UNISDR Chief Compares Typhoon Sendong To Japanese Tsunami

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AsianScientist (Feb. 2, 2012) - The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction, Margareta Wahlström, met last Friday with the Philippines Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Albert F. Del Rosario, following a three-day visit to the typhoon-devastated coastal cities of Iligan and Cayagan de Oro in Mindanao.

Typhoon Sendong claimed 1,430 lives after it struck in the middle of the night on December 16 last year, making it the second most deadly disaster of the last twelve months.

Wahlström who also heads UNISDR, the UN office for disaster risk reduction, described what she saw to be reminiscent of the devastating Japan tsunami of 2011 and the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004.

> "What I have seen in Kalakala in Cagayan de Oro reminds me of the impacts made by major tsunamis such as the one which hit Japan last year or the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004. In Kalakala you really feel the magnitude of the disaster and the force of the water which took so many lives, uprooted trees and swept away houses," she said.

During the meeting, she discussed with Secretary Del Rosario the need for social mobilization to be linked to early flood warnings to ensure timely evacuations. They also discussed the combination of environmental factors which contributed to the disaster including illegal logging, the need to develop risk-sensitive comprehensive land use plans, and the need for greater cooperation between the public and private sectors to reduce risk.

The Philippines topped the disaster league table last year with 33 major reported events, twelve more than China, and affecting 12.5 percent of the population.

In December 2011, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the UN's regional development arm for the Asia-Pacific region, revealed that 90 percent of the global US$270 billion of economic losses to natural disasters in the past year occurred in Asia.

From earthquakes in New Zealand and Japan, to heavy flooding in Australia and Asia, economic losses in the first nine months of 2011 came to $259 billion, of which only about $52 billion was insured, according to Munich Re, a global insurance company which covers natural disasters.

Source: UNISDR; IRIN; Photo: cBobby Lagsa/NPPA Images.

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